

For a Free Independent Soviet Ukraine!

THREE ARTICLES BY Leon Trotsky

- **The Ukrainian Question**-April 22, 1938
- **To the Ukrainian Comrades in Canada**-October 20, 1934
- **Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads**-July 30, 1939

INTRODUCTION

From the brilliant and revolutionary pen of Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution, come these three articles in defense of national self-determination in the Ukraine. Although Trotsky was instrumental in the founding of the Soviet Union, its army, and government, he rejected the Russification policies of the Soviet government while continuing to defend the tremendous social gains of the October Revolution.

In these articles, he cogently shows how Stalin and his bureaucratic cohorts inverted the Leninist principle of national self-determination for oppressed nationalities and turned this principle into its very opposite. Trotsky traces the root of this policy to the total degeneration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from an instrument of proletarian internationalism to an instrument serving the greedy interests of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

In addition, Trotsky polemicizes against "sectarian muddleheads" who in the name of anti-Stalinism and Leninism reject the demands of the Ukrainian nation for its self-determination, i.e. separation. To their false concept of relations between socialist nations, Trotsky counterposed the slogan "For a Free, Independent Soviet Ukraine".

For this revolutionary defense of the Leninist principle of national self-determination and for his unrelenting efforts to counterpose revolutionary Marxism to reactionary Stalinism, Trotsky was assassinated by Stalin's hired executioner in 1940. But Stalin failed to kill the ideas which Trotsky stood for and which appear so eloquently 24 years later in this pamphlet.

October 1974

THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION

April 22, 1938

The Ukrainian question, which many governments and many "socialists" and even "communists" have tried to forget or to relegate to the deep strongbox of history, has once again been placed on the order of the day and this time with redoubled force. The latest aggravation of the Ukrainian question is most intimately bound up with the degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Comintern (1), the successes of fascism and the approach of the next imperialist war. Crucified by four states, the Ukraine now occupies in the fate of Europe the same position that was once occupied by Poland; with this difference — that world relations are now infinitely more tense and the tempos of development accelerated. The Ukrainian question is destined in

the immediate future to play an enormous role in the life of Europe. It was not for nothing that Hitler (*fascist party leader who led Germany into World War 2 --Ed.*) so noisily raised the question of creating a "Greater Ukraine," and likewise it was not for nothing that he dropped this question with such stealthy haste.

A Question That Must Not Be Ignored

The Second International, expressing the interests of the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy of the imperialist states, completely ignored the Ukrainian question. Even its left wing did not pay the necessary attention to it. Suffice it to recall that Rosa Luxemburg (*noted Polish revolutionary leader and author -- Ed.*), for all her brilliant intellect and genuinely revolutionary spirit, found it possible to declare that the Ukrainian question was the invention of a handful of intellectuals. This position left a deep imprint even upon the Polish Communist Party. The Ukrainian question was looked upon by the official leaders of the Polish section of the Comintern as an obstacle rather than a revolutionary problem. Hence the constant opportunist attempts to shy away from this question, to suppress it, to pass over it in silence, or to postpone it to an indefinite future.

The Bolshevik party (*led by Lenin & Trotsky to victory in Russia 1917 --Ed.*), not without difficulty and only gradually under the constant pressure of Lenin, was able to acquire a correct approach to the Ukrainian question. The right to self-determination, that is, to separation, was extended by Lenin equally to the Poles and to the Ukrainians. He did not recognize aristocratic nations. Every inclination to evade or postpone the problem of an oppressed nationality he regarded as a manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism.

After the conquest of power, a serious struggle took place in the party over the solving of the numerous national problems inherited from old Czarist Russia. In his capacity as People's Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin invariably represented the most centralist and bureaucratic tendency. This evinced itself especially on the question of Georgia and on the question of the Ukraine. The correspondence dealing with these matters has remained unpublished to this day. We hope to publish a section of it -- the very small section which is at our disposal. **Every line of Lenin's letters and proposals vibrate with an urge to accede as far as possible to those nationalities that have been oppressed in the past. In the proposals and declarations of Stalin, on the contrary, the tendency toward bureaucratic centralism was invariably pronounced. In order to guarantee "administrative needs," i.e., the interests of the bureaucracy; the most legitimate claims of the oppressed nationalities were declared a manifestation of petit-bourgeois nationalism** (*emphasis by the Web. Ed.*) All these symptoms could be observed as early as 1922-23. Since that time they have developed monstrously and have led to outright strangulation of any kind of independent national development of the peoples of the USSR.

The Bolshevik Conception of Soviet Ukraine

In the conception of the old Bolshevik party the Soviet Ukraine was destined to become a powerful axis around which the other sections of the Ukrainian people would unite. It is indisputable that in the first period of its existence, Soviet Ukraine exerted a mighty attractive force, in national respects as well, and aroused to struggle the workers, peasants, and revolutionary intelligentsia of Western Ukraine enslaved by Poland. But during the years of

Thermidorian reaction (*see Note 52 at conclusion*), the position of Soviet Ukraine and together with it the posing of the Ukrainian question as a whole changed sharply. The more profound the hopes aroused, the keener was the disillusionment. The bureaucracy strangled and plundered the people within Great Russia, too. But in the Ukraine matters were further complicated by the massacre of national hopes. Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine in the struggle against the powerful, deeply-rooted longings of the Ukrainian masses for greater freedom and independence. To the totalitarian bureaucracy, Soviet Ukraine became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR (*Russian Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*). To be sure, the Stalin bureaucracy erects statues to Shevchenko but only in order more thoroughly to crush the Ukrainian people under their weight and to force it to chant paeans in the language of Kobzar to the rapist clique in the Kremlin.

Toward the sections of the Ukraine now outside its frontiers, the Kremlin's attitude today is the same as it is toward all oppressed nationalities, all colonies, and semi-colonies, i.e., small change in its international combinations with imperialist governments. At the recent 18th Congress of the "Communist Party," Manuilsky, one of the most revolting renegades of Ukrainian communism, quite openly explained that not only the USSR but also the Comintern (the "gyp-joint," according to Stalin's formulation) refused to demand the emancipation of oppressed peoples whenever their oppressors are not the enemies of the ruling Moscow clique. India is nowadays being defended by Stalin, Dimitrov and Manuilsky against — Japan, but not against England. Western Ukraine they are ready to cede forever to Poland in exchange for a diplomatic agreement which appears profitable at the present time to the bureaucrats of the Kremlin (*former tsarist bastion in Moscow since 1917 headquarters of the Revolution*). It is a far cry from the days when they went no further than episodic combinations in their politics.

Stalin, Hitler and the Ukraine

Not a trace remains of the former confidence and sympathy of the Western Ukrainian masses for the Kremlin. Since the latest murderous "purge" in the Ukraine no one in the West wants to become part of the Kremlin satrapy which continues to bear the name of Soviet Ukraine. The worker and peasant masses in the Western Ukraine, in Bukovina, in the Carpatho-Ukraine are in a state of confusion: Where to turn? What to demand? This situation naturally shifts the leadership to the most reactionary Ukrainian cliques who express their "nationalism" by seeking to sell the Ukrainian people to one imperialism or another in return for a promise of fictitious independence. Upon this tragic confusion Hitler bases his policy in the Ukrainian question. At one time we said: but for Stalin (i.e., but for the fatal policy of the Comintern in Germany) there would have been no Hitler. To this can now be added: but for the rape of Soviet Ukraine by the Stalinist bureaucracy there would be no Hitlerite Ukrainian policy.

We shall not pause here to analyze the motives that impelled Hitler to discard, for the time being at least, the slogan of a Greater Ukraine. These motives must be sought in the fraudulent combinations of German imperialism on the one hand and on the other in the fear of conjuring up an evil spirit whom it might be difficult to exorcize. Hitler gave Carpatho-Ukraine as a gift to the Hungarian butchers. This was done, if not with Moscow's open approval then in any case

with confidence that approval would be forthcoming. It is as if Hitler had said to Stalin: "If I were preparing to attack Soviet Ukraine tomorrow I should have kept Carpatho-Ukraine in my own hands." In reply, Stalin at the 18th Party Congress openly came to Hitler's defense against the slanders of the "Western Democracies." Hitler intends to attack the Ukraine? Nothing of the sort! Fight with Hitler? Not the slightest reason for it. Stalin is obviously interpreting the handing over of Carpatho-Ukraine to Hungary as an act of peace.

For a Free, Independent Soviet Ukraine!

This means that sections of the Ukrainian people have become so much small change for the Kremlin in its international calculations. The Fourth International (*established in 1938 regrouping Trotskyist forces worldwide to counter Stalinism --Ed.*) must clearly understand the enormous importance of the Ukrainian question in the fate not only of Southeastern and Eastern Europe but also of Europe as a whole. We are dealing with a people that has proved its viability, that is numerically equal to the population of France and occupies an exceptionally rich territory which, moreover, is of the highest strategical importance. The question of the fate of the Ukraine has been posed in its full scope. A clear and definite slogan is necessary that corresponds to the new situation. In my opinion there can be at the present time only one such slogan: **A united, free and independent workers' and peasants' Soviet Ukraine** (*emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

This program is in irreconcilable contradiction first of all with the interests of the three imperialist powers, Poland, Rumania, and Hungary. Only hopeless pacifist blockheads are capable of thinking that the emancipation and unification of the Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful diplomatic means, by referendums, by decisions of the League of Nations, etc. In no way superior to them of course are those "nationalists" who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by entering the service of one imperialism against another. Hitler gave an invaluable lesson to those adventurers by tossing (for how long?) Carpatho-Ukraine to the Hungarians who immediately slaughtered not a few trusting Ukrainians. Insofar as the issue depends upon the military strength of the imperialist states, the victory of one grouping or another can signify only a new dismemberment and a still more brutal subjugation of the Ukrainian people. The program of independence for the Ukraine in the epoch of imperialism is directly and indissolubly bound up with the program of the proletarian revolution. It would be criminal to entertain any illusions on this score.

Soviet Constitution Admits Right of Self-Determination

But the independence of a United Ukraine would mean the separation of Soviet Ukraine from the USSR, the "friends" of the Kremlin will exclaim in chorus. What is so terrible about that? — we reply. The fervid worship of state boundaries is alien to us. We do not hold the position of a "united and indivisible" whole. After all, even the constitution of the USSR acknowledges the right of its component federated peoples to self-determination, that is, to separation. Thus, not even the incumbent Kremlin oligarchy dares to deny this principle. To be sure it remains only on paper. The slightest attempt to raise the question of an independent Ukraine openly would mean immediate execution on the charge of treason. But it is precisely this despicable equivocation, it is precisely this ruthless hounding of all free national thought that has led the toiling masses of the Ukraine, to an even greater degree than the masses of Great Russia, to look upon the rule of the Kremlin as monstrously oppressive. In the face of

such an internal situation it is naturally impossible even to talk of Western Ukraine voluntarily joining the USSR as it is at present constituted. Consequently, the unification of the Ukraine presupposes freeing the so-called Soviet Ukraine from the Stalinist boot. In this matter, too, the Bonapartist clique will reap what it has sown.

But wouldn't this mean the military weakening of the USSR? — the "friends" of the Kremlin will howl in horror. **We reply that the weakening of the USSR is caused by those ever-growing centrifugal tendencies generated by the Bonapartist dictatorship** (*see Note 52 at conclusion --Ed.*) **In the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October. The source of defeatist moods is in the Kremlin. An independent Soviet Ukraine, on the other hand, would become, if only by virtue of its own interests, a mighty southwestern bulwark of the USSR. The sooner the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed and swept away, the firmer the defense of the Soviet Republic will become and the more certain its socialist future.** (*This statement prophetic of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-91 -- text emphasized by the Web Ed.*)

Against Imperialism and Moscow Bonapartism

Naturally an independent workers' and peasants' Ukraine might subsequently join the Soviet Federation; but voluntarily, on conditions which it itself considers acceptable, which in turn presupposes a revolutionary regeneration of the USSR. The genuine emancipation of the Ukrainian people is inconceivable without a revolution or a series of revolutions in the West which must lead in the end to the creation of the Soviet United States of Europe. An independent Ukraine could and undoubtedly will join this federation as an equal member. The proletarian revolution in Europe, in turn would not leave one stone standing (upon another) of the revolting structure of Stalinist Bonapartism. In that case the closest union of the Soviet United States of Europe and the regenerated USSR would be inevitable and would present infinite advantages for the European and Asiatic continents, including of course the Ukraine too. But here we are shifting to questions of second and third order. **The question of first order is the revolutionary guarantee of the unity and independence of a workers' and peasants' Ukraine in the struggle against imperialism on the other hand and against Moscow Bonapartism on the other.** (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

The Ukraine is especially rich and experienced in false paths of struggle for national emancipation. Here everything has been tried: the petit-bourgeois Rada, and Skoropadski, and Petlura, and "alliance" with the Hohenzollerns and combinations with the Entente. After all these experiments, only political cadavers can continue to place hope in any one of the fractions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as the leader of the leader of the national struggle for emancipation. The Ukrainian proletariat alone is capable not only of solving the task — which is revolutionary in its very essence — but also of taking the initiative for its solution. The proletariat and only the proletariat can rally around itself the peasant masses and the genuinely revolutionary national intelligentsia.

At the beginning of the last imperialist war the Ukrainians, Melenevski ("Basok") and Skompis-Veltukhovski, attempted to place the Ukrainian liberation movement under the wing of the Hohenzollern general Ludendorff. They covered themselves in so doing with left

phrases. With one kick the revolutionary Marxists booted these people out. That is how revolutionists must continue to behave in the future. The impending war will create a favorable atmosphere for all sorts of adventurers, miracle-hunters and seekers of the golden fleece. These gentlemen, who especially love to warm their hands in the vicinity of the national question, must not be allowed within artillery range of the labor movement. Not the slightest compromise with imperialism, either fascist or democratic! Not the slightest concession to the Ukrainian nationalists, either clerical-reactionary or liberal-pacifist! No "People's Fronts"! The complete independence of the proletarian party as the vanguard of the toilers!

For an International Discussion

This appears to me the correct policy in the Ukrainian question. I speak here personally and in my own name. The question must be opened up to international discussion. The foremost place in this discussion must belong to the Ukrainian revolutionary Marxists. We shall listen with the greatest attention to their voices. But they had better make haste. There is little time left for preparation!

April 22. 1938

(Eight months before World War 2 broke out under the Nazi juggernaut -ed.)

(Note: (1) Comintern, short term for 'Communist International,' (the "C.I."), centered in Moscow, established by the victorious 1917 Russian Bolshevik revolution to organize and coordinate the world revolutionary parties inspired by it --Web Ed.)

TO THE UKRAINIAN COMRADES IN CANADA (104)

(October 20, 1934)

To the Editors of *Robitnichi Visti*

Dear Friends:

It is with great interest and warm sympathy that I follow your efforts to extend the ideas and methods of unfalsified Marxism (Leninism) among the Ukrainian proletarians in Canada.

The theory and practice of "socialism in one country" stand in particularly sharp contradiction to the interests of the Ukrainian proletariat. The principal factor holding back the development of the highly talented Ukrainian people is its national dismemberment, which has been accompanied, and is now being accompanied, by cruel national oppression in the capitalist countries. The October Revolution (*then the popular reference to the Russian Revolution of 1917 -- Web Ed.*) unquestionably gave a mighty impetus to the development of Ukrainian culture. However, while the toiling masses of the entire Soviet Union are suffering many losses in their development under the present Soviet bureaucracy, the Ukrainian workers and peasants are in addition suffering the consequences of their national dismemberment. What a magnificent achievement it would be if the Ukrainian people could be reunited in its entirety in a Soviet

Ukraine! What a far-reaching development would be in store for Ukrainian culture then!

Only the European and international revolution, starting with Poland, could bring to the Ukrainian people its complete national unification and liberation.

Advanced Ukrainian workers have less reason than any other workers to be satisfied with the theory of "socialism in one country." This conservative theory does not open up before them even the perspective of national liberation, which is an elementary prerequisite of socialist society. That is why I follow with great pleasure your efforts to explain to the Ukrainian workers that their fate, as well as the fate of the entire toiling Ukrainian people, is intimately and indissolubly linked not only to the fate of the Soviet Union but also to the fate of the international proletarian revolution.

I regret very much that I am not able to write you this letter in Ukrainian (105). Even though I have known the Ukrainian language since my childhood and have been inspired by the lines of the great Shevchenko, (106) learning his verses by heart, and although I am able to follow your newspaper, my own Ukrainian vocabulary is a bit too meager to permit me to express myself in writing directly in Ukrainian. But I hope that these lines will reach you in a competent Ukrainian translation.

Fraternal greetings,
L. Trotsky

Notes

(104) "To the Ukrainian Comrades in Canada." *Robitnichi Visti*, December 1, 1934. *Robitnichi Visti* (Workers News) was a Ukrainian-language periodical published in Toronto from 1933 to 1938 by the Canadian section of the ICL. Translated for this volume by Robert Vernon. Trotsky's later thinking on the Soviet Ukraine will be found in *Writings* 39-40.

(105) Trotsky himself was born and raised in the Ukraine.
(*Trotsky's early years are well described in the first six chapters of his autobiography My Life* (1929), published by Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970 -- Web Ed.)

(106) Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) was a Ukrainian poet who became known as the father of Ukrainian nationalist literature. He founded an organization to promote social equality, abolition of slavery, etc.

INDEPENDENCE OF THE UKRAINE AND SECTARIAN MUDDLEHEADS

July 30, 1939

In one of the tiny, sectarian publications which appear in America and which thrive upon the crumbs from the table of the Fourth International, and repay with blackest ingratitude, I chanced across an article devoted to the Ukrainian problem. What confusion! The

author-sectarian is, of course, opposed to the slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine. He is **for** the world revolution and **for** socialism—"root and branch." He accuses us of ignoring the interests of the USSR and of retreating from the concept of the permanent revolution. (49) He indicts us as centrists. The critic is very severe, almost implacable. Unfortunately, he understands nothing at all (the name of this tiny publication, *The Marxist*, rings rather ironically). But his incapacity to understand assumes such finished, almost classical forms as can enable us better and more fully to clarify the question.

Our critic takes as his point of departure the following position: "If the workers in the Soviet Ukraine overthrow Stalinism and reestablish a genuine workers' state, shall they separate from the rest of the Soviet Union? No." And so forth and so on. "If the workers overthrow Stalinism . . ." then we shall be able to see more clearly what to do. But Stalinism must first be overthrown. And in order to achieve this, one must not shut one's eyes to the growth of separatist tendencies in the Ukraine, but rather give them a correct political expression.

"Not turning our backs on the Soviet Union," continues the author, "but its regeneration and reestablishment as a mighty citadel of world revolution — that is the road of Marxism." The actual trend of the development of the masses, in this instance, of the nationally oppressed masses, is replaced by our sage with speculations as to the best possible roads of development. With this method, but with far greater logic, one might say, "Not defending a degenerated Soviet Union is our task, but the victorious world revolution which will transform the whole world into a World Soviet Union," etc. Such aphorisms come cheap.

The critic repeats several times my statement to the effect that the fate of an independent Ukraine is indissolubly bound up with the world proletarian revolution. From this general perspective, ABC for a Marxist, he contrives however to make a recipe of temporizing passivity and national nihilism. The triumph of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is the end-product of multiple movements, campaigns and battles, and not at all a ready-made precondition for solving all questions automatically. Only a direct and bold posing of the Ukrainian question in the given concrete circumstances will facilitate the rallying of petit-bourgeois and peasant masses around the proletariat, just as in Russia in 1917.

True enough, our author might object that in Russia prior to October it was the bourgeois revolution that unfolded, whereas today we have the socialist revolution already behind us. A demand which might have been progressive in 1917 is nowadays reactionary. Such reasoning, wholly in the spirit of bureaucrats and sectarians, is false from beginning to end.

The right of national self-determination is, of course, a democratic and not a socialist principle. But genuinely democratic principles are supported and realized in our era only by the revolutionary proletariat; it is for this very reason that they interlace with socialist tasks. The resolute struggle of the Bolshevik Party for the right of self-determination of oppressed nationalities in Russia facilitated in the extreme the conquest of power by the proletariat. It was as if the proletarian revolution had sucked in the democratic problems, above all, the agrarian and national problems, giving to the Russian Revolution a combined character. The proletariat was already undertaking socialist tasks but it could not immediately raise to this level the

peasantry and the oppressed nations (themselves predominantly peasant) who were absorbed with solving their democratic tasks.

Hence flowed the historically inescapable compromises in the agrarian as well as the national sphere. Despite the economic advantages of large-scale agriculture, the Soviet government was compelled to divide up large estates. Only several years later was the government able to pass to collective farming and then it immediately leaped too far ahead and found itself compelled, a few years later, to make concessions to the peasants in the shape of private land-holdings which in many places tend to devour the collective farms. The next stages of this contradictory process have not yet been resolved.

The need for compromise, or rather for a number of compromises, similarly arises in the field of the national question, whose paths are no more rectilinear than the paths of the agrarian revolution. The federated structure of the Soviet Republic represents a compromise between the centralist requirements of planned economy and the decentralist requirements of the development of nations oppressed in the past. Having constructed a workers' state on the compromise principle of a federation, the Bolshevik Party wrote into the constitution the right of nations to complete separation, indicating thereby that the party did not at all consider the national question as solved once and for all.

The author of the critical article argues that the party leaders hoped "to convince the masses to stay within the framework of the Federated Soviet Republic." This is correct, if the word "convince" is taken not in the sense of logical arguments but in the sense of passing through the experiences of economic, political, and cultural collaboration. Abstract agitation in favor of centralism does not of itself carry great weight. As has already been said, the federation was a necessary departure from centralism. It must also be added that the very composition of the federation is by no means given beforehand once and for all. Depending on objective conditions, a federation may develop toward greater centralism, or on the contrary, toward greater independence of its national component parts. Politically it is not at all a question of whether it is advantageous "in general" for various nationalities to live together within the framework of a single state, but rather it is a question of whether or not a particular nationality has, on the basis of her own experience, found it advantageous to adhere to a given state.

In other words: Which of the two tendencies in the given circumstances gains the ascendancy in the compromise regime of a federation — the centrifugal or the centripetal? Or to put it even more concretely: Have Stalin and his Ukrainian satraps succeeded in convincing the Ukrainian masses of the superiority of Moscow's centralism over Ukrainian independence or have they failed? This question is of decisive importance. Yet our author does not even suspect its existence.

Do the broad masses of the Ukrainian people wish to separate from the USSR? It might at first sight appear difficult to answer this question, inasmuch as the Ukrainian people, like all other peoples of the USSR, are deprived of any opportunity to express their will. But the very genesis of the totalitarian regime and its ever more brutal intensification, especially in the Ukraine, are proof that the real will of the Ukrainian masses is irreconcilably hostile to the

Soviet bureaucracy. There is no lack of evidence that one of the primary sources of this hostility is the suppression of Ukrainian independence. The nationalist tendencies in the Ukraine erupted violently in 1917-1919. The Borotba Party expressed these tendencies in the left wing.(50) The most important indication of the success of the Leninist policy in the Ukraine was the fusion of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party with the organization of the Borotbists.

In the course of the next decade, however, an actual break occurred with the Borotba group, whose leaders were subjected to persecution. The Old Bolshevik Skrypnik, a pure-blooded Stalinist, was driven to suicide in 1933 for his allegedly excessive patronage of nationalist tendencies. The actual "organizer" of this suicide was the Stalinist emissary, Postyshev, who thereupon remained in the Ukraine as the representative of the centralist policy.(51) Presently, however, Postyshev himself fell into disgrace. These facts are profoundly symptomatic, for they reveal how much force there is behind the pressure of the nationalist opposition on the bureaucracy. Nowhere did the purges and repressions assume such a savage and mass character as they did in the Ukraine.

Of enormous political importance is the sharp turn away from the Soviet Union of Ukrainian democratic elements outside the Soviet Union. When the Ukrainian problem became aggravated early this year, Communist voices were not heard at all; but the voices of the Ukrainian clericals and National Socialists were loud enough. This means that the proletarian vanguard has let the Ukrainian national movement slip out of its hands and that this movement has progressed far on the road of separatism. Lastly, very indicative also are the moods among the Ukrainian emigres in the North American continent. In Canada, for instance, where the Ukrainians compose the bulk of the Communist Party, there began in 1933, as I am informed by a prominent participant in the movement, a marked exodus of Ukrainian workers and farmers from communism, falling either into passivity or nationalism of various hues. In their totality, these symptoms and facts incontestably testify to the growing strength of separatist tendencies among the Ukrainian masses.

This is the basic fact underlying the whole problem. It shows that despite the giant step forward taken by the October Revolution (*again, the popular reference to the Russian Revolution of 1917 -Web Ed.*) in the domain of national relations, the isolated proletarian revolution in a backward country proved incapable of solving the national question, especially the Ukrainian question which is, in its very essence, international in character. The Thermidorean reaction, crowned by Bonapartist bureaucracy (*see Note 52 at end of article explaining these characterizations of Stalinism --Web Ed.*), has thrown the toiling masses far back in the national sphere as well.(52) The great masses of the Ukrainian people are dissatisfied with their national fate and wish to change it drastically. It is this fact that the revolutionary politician must, in contrast to the bureaucrat and the sectarian, take as his point of departure.

If our critic were capable of thinking politically, he would have surmised without much difficulty the arguments of the Stalinists against the slogan of an independent Ukraine: "It negates the position of the defense of the Soviet Union"; "disrupts the unity of the revolutionary masses"; "serves not the interests of revolution but those of imperialism." In other words, the

Stalinists would repeat all the three arguments of our author. They will unfailingly do so on the morrow.

The Kremlin bureaucracy tells the Soviet woman: inasmuch as there is socialism in our country, you must be happy and you must give up abortions (or suffer the penalty). To the Ukrainian they say: inasmuch as the socialist revolution has solved the national question, it is your duty to be happy in the USSR and to renounce all thought of separation (or face the firing squad).

What does a revolutionist say to the woman? "You will decide yourself whether you want a child; I will defend your right to abortion against the Kremlin police." To the Ukrainian people he says: "Of importance to me is your attitude toward your national destiny and not the 'socialistic' sophistries of the Kremlin police; I will support your struggle for independence with all my might!"

The sectarian, as so often happens, finds himself siding with the police, covering up the status quo, that is, police violence, by sterile speculation on the superiority of the socialist unification of nations as against their remaining divided. Assuredly, the separation of the Ukraine is a liability as compared with a voluntary and equalitarian socialist federation: but it will be an unquestionable asset as compared with the bureaucratic strangulation of the Ukrainian people. In order to draw together more closely and honestly, it is sometimes necessary first to separate. Lenin often used to cite the fact that the relations between the Norwegian and Swedish workers improved and became closer after the disruption of the compulsory unification of Sweden and Norway.

We must proceed from facts and not ideal norms. The Thermidorean (*bureaucratic counter-revolutionary* --Web Ed.) reaction in the USSR, the defeat of a number of revolutions, the victories of fascism — which is carving the map of Europe in its own fashion — must be paid for in genuine currency in all spheres, including that of the Ukrainian question. Were we to ignore the new situation created as a result of defeats, were we to pretend that nothing extraordinary has occurred, and were we to counterpose familiar abstractions to unpleasant facts, then we could very well surrender to reaction the remaining chances for vengeance in the more or less immediate future.

Our author interprets the slogan of an independent Ukraine as follows: "**First** the Soviet Ukraine must be freed from the rest of the Soviet Union; **then** we will have the proletarian revolution and unification of the rest of the Ukraine." But how can there be a separation without first a revolution? The author is caught in a vicious circle, and the slogan of an independent Ukraine together with Trotsky's "faulty logic" is hopelessly discredited. In point of fact this peculiar logic -- "first" and "then" — is only a striking example of scholastic thinking. **Our hapless critic has no inkling of the fact that historical processes may occur not "first" and "then" but run parallel to each other, exert influence upon each other, speed or retard each other; and that the task of revolutionary politics consists precisely in speeding up the mutual action and reaction of progressive processes. The barb of the slogan of an independent Ukraine is aimed directly against the Moscow bureaucracy and enables the proletarian vanguard to rally the peasant masses. On the other hand, the same slogan**

opens up for the proletarian party the opportunity of playing a leading role in the national Ukrainian movement in Poland, Rumania, and Hungary. Both of these political processes will drive the revolutionary movement forward and increase the specific weight of the proletarian vanguard. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

My statement to the effect that workers and peasants of Western Ukraine (Poland) do not want to join the Soviet Union, as it is now constituted, and that this fact is an additional argument in favor of an independent Ukraine, is parried by our sage with the assertion that even if they desired, they could not join the Soviet Union because they could do so only "after the proletarian revolution in Western Ukraine" (obviously Poland). In other words: **Today** the separation of the Ukraine is impossible, and **after** the revolution triumphs, it would be reactionary. An old and familiar refrain!

Luxemburg, Bukharin, Pyatakov and many others used this very same argument against the program of national self-determination: under capitalism it is utopian; under socialism, reactionary. The argument is false to the core because it ignores the epoch of the social revolution and its tasks. To be sure, under the domination of imperialism a genuine stable and reliable independence of the small and intermediate nations is impossible. It is equally true that under fully developed socialism, that is to say, with the progressive withering away of the state, the question of national boundaries will fall away. But between these two moments—the present day and complete socialism — intervene those decades in the course of which we are preparing to realize our program. The slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine is of paramount importance for mobilizing the masses and for educating them in the transitional period (*emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

The sectarian simply ignores the fact that the national struggle, one of the most labyrinthine and complex but at the same time extremely important forms of the class struggle, cannot be suspended by bare references to the future world revolution. With their eyes turned away from the USSR, and failing to receive support and leadership from the international proletariat, the petit-bourgeois and even working class masses of the Western Ukraine are falling victim to reactionary demagogy. Similar processes are undoubtedly also taking place in the Soviet Ukraine, only it is more difficult to lay them bare. The slogan of an independent Ukraine advanced in time by the proletarian vanguard will lead to the unavoidable stratification of the petit-bourgeoisie and render it easier for its lower tiers to ally themselves with the proletariat. Only thus is it possible to prepare the proletarian revolution.

"If the Workers carry through a successful revolution in Western Ukraine . . ." persists our author, "should our strategy then be to demand that the Soviet Ukraine separate and join its western section? Just the opposite." This assertion plumbs to the bottom the depth of "our strategy." **Again we hear the same melody: "If the workers carry through. . ."** The sectarian is satisfied with logical deduction from a victorious revolution supposedly already achieved. But for a revolutionist the nub of the question lies precisely in how to clear a road to the revolution, how to render an approach to revolution easier for the masses, how to draw the revolution closer, how to assure its triumph. "If the workers carry through ..." a victorious revolution, everything will of course be fine. But just now there is no victorious revolution; instead there is victorious reaction.

To find the bridge from reaction to revolution — that is the task. This is the import, by the way, of our entire program of transitional demands (*The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* --See Note 54) Small wonder that the sectarians of all shadings fail to understand its meaning. They operate by means of abstractions — an abstraction of imperialism and an abstraction of the socialist revolution. The question of the transition from real imperialism to real revolution, the question of how to mobilize the masses in the given historical situation for the conquest of power, remains for these sterile wiseacres a book sealed with seven seals.

Piling one dire accusation indiscriminately on top of another, our critic declares that the slogan of an independent Ukraine serves the interests of the imperialists (!) and the Stalinists (!!) because it "completely negates the position of the defense of the Soviet Union." It is impossible to understand just why the "interests of the Stalinists" are dragged in. But let us confine ourselves to the question of the defense of the USSR. This defense could be menaced by an independent Ukraine only if the latter were hostile not only to the bureaucracy but also to the USSR. However, given such a premise (obviously false), how can a socialist demand that a hostile Ukraine be retained within the framework of the USSR? Or does the question involve only the period of the national revolution?

Yet our critic apparently recognized the inevitability of a political revolution against the Bonapartist bureaucracy.(55) Meanwhile this revolution, like every revolution, will undoubtedly present a certain danger from the standpoint of defense. What to do? Had our critic really thought out the problem, he would have replied that such a danger is an inescapable historical risk which cannot be evaded, for under the rule of the Bonapartist bureaucracy the USSR is doomed. The very same reasoning equally and wholly applies to the revolutionary national uprising which represents nothing else but a single segment of the political revolution.

It is noteworthy that the most serious argument against independence does not even enter the mind of our critic. The economy of the Soviet Ukraine enters integrally into this plan. The separation of the Ukraine threatens to break down the plan and to lower the productive forces. But this argument, too, is not decisive. An economic plan is not the holy of holies. If national sections within the federation, despite the unified plan, are pulling in opposite directions, it means that the plan does not satisfy them. A plan is the handiwork of men. It can be reconstructed in accordance with new boundaries. In so far as the plan is advantageous for the Ukraine she will herself desire and know how to reach the necessary economic agreement with the Soviet Union, just as she will be able to conclude the necessary military alliance.

Moreover, it is impermissible to forget that the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan, and exact a heavy toll from the Ukraine. The plan must be drastically revised first and foremost from this standpoint. The outlived ruling caste is systematically destroying the country's economy, the army and its culture; it is annihilating the flower of the population and preparing the ground for a catastrophe. The heritage of the revolution can be saved only by an overturn. The bolder and more resolute is the policy of the proletarian vanguard on the national question among others, all the more successful will be the revolutionary overturn, all the lower its overhead expenses.

The slogan of an independent Ukraine does not signify that the Ukraine will remain forever isolated, but only this, that she will again determine for herself and of her own free will the question of her interrelations with other sections of the Soviet Union and her western neighbors. Let us take an ideal variant most favorable for our critic. The revolution occurs simultaneously in all parts of the Soviet Union. The bureaucratic octopus is strangled and swept aside. The constituent congress of the Soviets is on the order of the day.

The Ukraine expresses a desire to determine anew her relations with the USSR. Even our critic, let us hope, will be ready to extend her this right. But in order freely to determine her relations with other Soviet republics, in order to possess the right of saying yes or no, the Ukraine must return to herself complete freedom of action, at least for the duration of this constituent period. There is no other name for this than state independence.

Now let us further suppose that the revolution simultaneously embraces also Poland, Rumania, and Hungary. All sections of the Ukrainian people become free and enter into negotiations to join the Soviet Ukraine. At the same time they all express the desire to have their say on the question of the interrelations between a unified Ukraine and the Soviet Union, with Soviet Poland, etc. It is self-evident that to decide all these questions it will be necessary to convene the constituent congress of the unified Ukraine. But a "constituent" congress signifies nothing else but the congress of an independent state which prepares anew to determine its own domestic regime as well as its international position.

There is every reason to assume that in the event of the triumph of the world revolution the tendencies toward unity will immediately acquire enormous force, and that all Soviet republics will find the suitable forms of ties and collaboration. This goal will be achieved only provided the old and compulsory ties, and in consequence old boundaries, are completely destroyed; only provided each of the contracting parties is completely independent. To speed and facilitate this process, to make possible a genuine brotherhood of the peoples in the future, the advanced workers of Great Russia must even now understand the causes for Ukrainian separatism, as well as the latent power and historical lawfulness behind it, and they must without any reservation declare to the Ukrainian people that they are ready to support with all their might the slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine in a joint struggle against the autocratic bureaucracy and against imperialism.

The petit-bourgeois Ukrainian nationalists consider correct the slogan of an independent Ukraine. But they object to the correlation of this slogan with the proletarian revolution. They want an independent democratic Ukraine and not a Soviet Ukraine. It is unnecessary to enter here into a detailed analysis of this question because it touches not the Ukraine alone but rather the general evaluation of our epoch, which we have analyzed many times. We shall outline only the most important aspects.

Democracy is degenerating and perishing even in its metropolitan centers. Only the wealthiest colonial empires or especially privileged bourgeois countries are still able to maintain nowadays a regime of democracy, and even there it is obviously on the downgrade. There is not the slightest basis for hoping that the comparatively impoverished and backward

Ukraine will be able to establish and maintain a regime of democracy. Indeed the very independence of the Ukraine would not be long-lived in an imperialist environment. The example of Czechoslovakia is eloquent enough. As long as the laws of imperialism prevail, the fate of small and intermediate nations will remain unstable and unreliable. Imperialism can be overthrown only by the proletarian revolution.

The main section of the Ukrainian nation is represented by the present-day Soviet Ukraine. A powerful and purely Ukrainian proletariat has been created there by the development of industry. It is they who are destined to be the leaders of the Ukrainian people in all their future struggles. The Ukrainian proletariat wishes to free itself from the clutches of the bureaucracy. The slogan of a democratic Ukraine is historically belated. The only thing it is good for is perhaps to console bourgeois intellectuals. It will not unite the masses. And without the masses, the emancipation and unification of the Ukraine are impossible.

Our severe critic flings at us the term "centrism" at every opportunity. According to him, the entire article was written so as to expose the glaring example of our "centrism." But he does not make even a single attempt to demonstrate wherein precisely consists the "centrism" of the slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine. Assuredly, that is no easy task.

Centrism is the name applied to that policy which is opportunist in substance and which seeks to appear as revolutionary in form. Opportunism consists in a passive adaption to the ruling class and its regime, to that which already exists, including, of course, the state boundaries. Centrism shares completely this fundamental trait of opportunism, but in adapting itself to the dissatisfied workers, centrism veils it by means of radical commentaries.

If we proceed from this scientific definition, it will appear that the position of our hapless critic is in part and in whole centrist. He takes as a starting point the specific (accidental — from the standpoint of rational and revolutionary politics) boundaries which cut nations into segments, as if this were something immutable. The world revolution, which is for him not living reality but the incantation of a witch-doctor, must unequivocally accept these boundaries as its point of departure.

He (*our critic*) is not at all concerned with the centrifugal nationalist tendencies which may flow into either the channels of reaction or the channels of revolution. They violate his lazy administrative blueprint constructed on the model of: "*first*" and "*then*." He shies away from the struggle for national independence against bureaucratic strangulation and takes refuge in speculations on the superiorities of socialist unity. In other words, his politics — if scholastic commentaries on other people's politics may be called politics — bear the worst traits of centrism. (*Emphasis by Web Ed.*)

The sectarian is an opportunist who stands in fear of himself. In sectarianism, opportunism (centrism) remains unfolded in its initial stages, like a delicate bud. Presently the bud unfolds, one-third, one-half, and sometimes more. Then we have the peculiar combination of sectarianism and centrism (Vereecken); of sectarianism and low-grade opportunism (Sneevliet). But on occasion the bud shrivels away, without unfolding (Oehler) If I am not mistaken, Oehler is the editor of *The Marxist*.

Notes

(49) The Marxist theory of permanent revolution elaborated by Trotsky states, among other things, that in order to accomplish and consolidate even bourgeois democratic tasks such as land reform in an underdeveloped country, the revolution must go beyond the limits of a democratic revolution into a socialist one, which sets up a workers' and peasants' government. Such a revolution will therefore not take place in "stages" (first a stage of capitalist development to be followed at some time in the future by a socialist revolution), but will be continuous or "permanent," passing immediately to a post-capitalist stage. For a full exposition of the theory, see *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, by Leon Trotsky (Pathfinder Press, 1972).

(50) The Ukrainian Borotba (Struggle) Party was active during 1918 to 1920, when it merged with the Ukrainian Communist Party. In the mid-twenties former Borotbists won the leadership of the Ukrainian CP, and carried out Ukrainization policies until the late twenties, when the Stalinists turned against Ukrainization and drove the Borotbists out of the leadership. Most of the Borotbists were killed in the purges of the thirties.

(51) Nikolai A. Skrypnik (1872-1933) joined the Russian Social Democracy in 1897. After the October Revolution he was at various times commissar for internal affairs and commissar for education in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and a member of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. An article on his suicide appears in *(Trotsky's) Writings 1932-33*. Pavel P. Postyshev (1888-1940) was an Old Bolshevik who became a member of the Politburo in 1926 and the secretary of the Communist Party in the Ukraine. He was arrested in 1938 and was later executed, but was exonerated in the Khrushchev revelations.

(52) **Thermidor** 1794 was the month in the new French calendar when the revolutionary Jacobins headed by Robespierre were overthrown by a reactionary wing in the revolution that did not go so far, however, as to restore the feudal regime. Trotsky used the term as a historical analogy to designate the seizure of power by the conservative Stalinist bureaucracy within the framework of nationalized property relations. **Bonapartism** is a Marxist term describing a dictatorship or regime with certain features of a dictatorship during a period when class rule is not secure; it is based on the military, police, and state bureaucracy, rather than on parliamentary parties or a mass movement (see Trotsky's essay "The Workers' State, Thermidor, and Bonapartism," in *Trotsky's Writings 1934-35*, Pathfinder Press).

(54) This document, also known as the Transitional Program, was adopted by the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938. Its full text is in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, by Leon Trotsky (Pathfinder Press, 1973).

(55) Trotsky called for a **political revolution** against the Stalinist bureaucracy to restore Soviet democracy and a revolutionary internationalist foreign policy. By a political revolution, he meant one that would topple the Stalinist regime but preserve the nationalized property relations that had been made possible by the revolution of 1917.

Published in pamphlet form and widely distributed in the Toronto Polish community by:
Forward Publishing Association, 1974

=====advertisement=====

AVAILABLE AT FORWARD PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION:

The Revolution Betrayed
by Leon Trotsky

\$3.45

Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition	
edited by George Saunders	\$4.75
Report from the Beria Reserve (<i>political police</i> --Ed.)	
by Valentyn Moroz	\$2.95
The Struggle for Socialist Democracy in the Soviet Bloc	
by Gus Horowitz (SWP-US)	\$0.70
The Invasion of Czechoslovakia	
edited by Les Evans (SWP)	\$0.65
Revolutionary Marxist Students in Poland Speak Out	
by Kuron and Modzelewski, A. Zambrowski,	
Isaac Deutscher	\$1 .50
Humanism and Socialism	
by George Novack (SWP)	\$2.50
The Permanent Revolution	
by Leon Trotsky	\$3.25
In Defense of Marxism	
by Leon Trotsky	\$3.25
Stalinism and Bolshevism	
by Leon Trotsky	\$0.60

Forward Bookstore

85 King Street East, Toronto, 363-6755